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ABSTRACT

The way in which organizations are governed has implications for the emergence of the roles and responsibilities of the participants. The successful collaboration which characterized the Urbana (Illinois) Year Long Project depended upon the evolution of the advisory committee's organization and the effectiveness of its governance. The project emerged from two years of discussions between Urbana public school personnel and the College of Education faculties at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign about improving teacher education for elementary certification. A proposal for a collaborative teacher education program emerged from the deliberations. The project goals which were most supported by the governance structure were development of a collaborative program that: (1) provided preservice students with a year long placement; (2) allowed school and university faculty to evolve roles and responsibilities beyond the traditional ones of cooperating teacher, methods instructor, university supervisor, and student teacher; and (3) the merging of and practice. In this collaborative model, decisions about program, scheduling, methods, supervision, and certification were made by the participants on the advisory committee, using consensus as the decision-making model. Participants represented school and university faculty and preservice students. (IAH)

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The Governance of a Collaborative Teacher Education Program: The
Emergence of New Structures and New Roles

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The Governance of a Collaborative Teacher Education Program: The Emergence of New Structures and New Roles

Organizations that begin with superimposed structures and administrative layers are more likely to be rigid. Organizations that begin without superimposed structures and administrative layers are more likely to be flexible. Additionally, organizations with simple tasks, for example, assembly lines, benefit more from bureaucratic structures. Organizations with complex tasks, for example, preparation of elementary school teachers, benefit more from flexible structures; that is, from loosely coupled systems (Weick, 1976). This paper suggests that the way that organizations are governed has implications for the emergence of the roles and responsibilities of the participants (Sergiovanni & Carver, 1973).

The successful collaboration of the Urbana Year Long Project depended upon the evolution of the organization and upon the effectiveness of its governance, the Advisory Committee. The project emerged from two years of discussions with the Urbana public school personnel and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, College of Education faculties about improvements in teacher education. What evolved from these deliberations was a proposal for a collaborative teacher education program. This mission was consistent with the aims of the Holmes Group and an organizational pattern that made sense, that avoided structures and roles that interfered with the goals of the project.

The project had four major questions which it sought to answer:

1. Can trust and collaboration be established between the university and public school personnel?
2. Can theory and practice be blended effectively in methods courses?

3. Can university educational researchers become effective teacher educators?

4. Will this intensive training program prepare more effective beginning teachers?

Two of the goals of the project most supported by its governance were the expectation of developing a collaborative program that provided students with a year long field placement, with the expectation that faculty members from the public schools and the university would evolve roles and responsibilities beyond the traditional ones of cooperating teacher, methods instructor, university supervisor, and student teacher and to merge theory and practice.

Administrators often believe that educational organizations are derived best from preassigned, rational structures and processes. The complication is that rationality depends upon the organization's ability to:

1. Determine the problem or mission;
2. Consider all of the possible alternatives;
3. Consider all of the possible consequences for each of the possible alternatives;
4. Identify a valuing mechanism to decide among competing alternatives and consequences (March and Simon, 1958).

What really happens in organizations is non-rational. Organizational structures and decision processes are premised upon the notion that man has limited abilities; that is, organizational actors, no matter how well-intentioned or well-funded, do not have complete knowledge or enough resources to know all of the possible alternatives and all of the consequences for each alternative. To assume that the organization is rational, predictable, stable, planned, subverts the very organizations that we create. A solution is

to admit our limited rationality, accept our incomplete knowledge, and apply non-rational structures and decision making processes to our organizations (March and Simon, 1958).

Organizations that are characterized by non-rational structures and processes may be seen as having what Weick calls "loosely coupled systems" (Weick, 1976). Loosely coupled systems are collections of semi-autonomous organizational groupings that have vague, impermanent, and unstructured relationships among themselves. The dean's office, for example, is loosely coupled to the department heads' offices. It is these loose couplings, defying rigid organizational structures, that provide the larger system with the opportunity for flexibility, adaptability, and increased communication. Tightly coupled systems, conversely, tend toward rigidity. Characteristics of loosely coupled educational systems include decentralization--shared governance, delegation of discretion--decision making at the level of the decision, and responsiveness--actions taken in response to interests, needs, and emergencies, not to organizational prerequisites. It is precisely these characteristics that make loosely coupled systems preferable. Certainly, the emergence of the governance of the Urbana Year Long Project, the Advisory Committee, reflected these advantages.

The Advisory Committee was adopted as the governance or ruling body of the project. The Advisory Committee selected two co-directors of the project and established its membership. Essentially, the Advisory Committee consisted of Urbana public school faculty who represented each participating building, principals of those buildings, several university faculty involved in teaching method courses and students in the project. Each participating building selected the building representatives in their own manner. The earliest function of the Advisory Committee was to design, collaboratively, a

year long field experience for university seniors seeking elementary school teaching certification. The Advisory Committee created a process in which faculty and students loosely coupled into instructional teams, professional teams, university supervisors, cooperating teachers, and building representatives each with representation on the Advisory Committee.

The Advisory Committee met twice each month to plan and evaluate the activities of the project which included the organization of the instructional teams, university class and field experience schedules, and the resolution of problems stemming from the project. All participants in the project had the right to attend committee meetings and to discuss issues. The Advisory Committee was committed to the notion that all participants were of equal standing and that consensus was the primary decision making process. The only exceptions were those issues that placed the project in conflict with school district, university, or state certification board policy.

The uniqueness of the Urbana Year Long Project's governance system was that participants, once confined by rigid roles, e.g. cooperating teacher, had the opportunity and the responsibility to redesign the program from the beginning. With the inception of the project participants broke from the rigid molds of previous relationships and designed responsibilities that incorporated several functions intersecting traditional roles. The faculties from the public schools and the university internalized the goal of providing a laboratory experience for students to blend theory and practice. Students, taught the elements of book conferences with children in the Language and Literacy Instructional Team, were able to practice those strategies, in their own classrooms with their own students, the very next day. Public school teachers were influenced by insightful theory, and university faculty absorbed the wisdom of the practitioners.

In the traditional program cooperating teachers and university supervisors each were responsible for one strand of the university student's experience. Seldom did their roles overlap; only occasionally did they integrate their responsibilities. The cooperating teacher tended to be more supportive, while the university supervisor, with the evaluator's role, tended to be more judgmental. The burden of a recommendation for certification may have interfered with the relationship among the cooperating teacher, the university supervisor, and the student teacher.

In the collaborative model, decisions about program, scheduling, methods, supervision, and certification were made by the participants using consensus as the decision model. All participants, therefore, carried the burdens of all the strands of the program. The traditional triad dissolved; the collaborative process emerged. Now instead of the public schools supplying cooperating teachers and the university providing methods instructors, supervisors, and students, the project involved professionals who crossed roles and responsibilities. Now it was possible for a first grade teacher to be a cooperating teacher, a building representative, and an instructor in the Language and Literacy Instructional Team. With expanded roles, the members coalesced into a collaborative, teacher education team with responsibilities and obligations to the Urbana Year Long Project's teacher education program.

The project undertook several training activities for all participants. Sessions were held for new participants, clarified supervisory strategies, revised program design, and developed mission statements and participant responsibilities. Throughout the existence of the project, participants were extensively surveyed and interviewed to explain the implications of a

collaborative, teacher education program. Although the final report has yet to be published, initial reviews indicate that the project was successful.

The shared decision making of the Urbana Year long Project had other unexpected benefits. Teachers in the project earned higher status among the general faculty. Project participants felt less constrained by the exigencies of the daily school routine, they appreciated the flexibility and freedom offered by the project's release time. Several teachers reported an upturn in morale and a new interest in teaching. Each year saw an increase in the number of public school teachers seeking participation and saw an increase in the number of schools requesting participation. University student interest increased drastically from the first to the third cohort. Both Urbana and university faculty reported allegiance to this teacher education design and reported that their personal learning increased as a result of the interaction among participants. Students reported a sense of confidence in the program, the instructors, the cooperating teachers, and in their own performance.

The planning of the Urbana Year Long Project is not complete. In fact, its governance, the Advisory Committee, and its decision model, consensus, supports the expectation that the project will evolve continuously. A new school district and three new schools will join the project for the 1991-92 academic year. The participants believe that the project will stretch the boundaries of teacher education to accept and to implement new ideas. The minimal administrative structure with its loosely coupled systems encourages these beliefs.

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